SYNOPSIS OF THE PROPOSED PH.D THESIS ON

POPULIST REASON – A PHILOSOPHICAL ENQUIRY

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1. Introduction

In the present research work on "**Populist Reason – A Philosophical Enquiry**", an attempt is made at first to define and explain the term 'Populism' as it is both widely used and widely contested. The term populism is used widely to describe phenomenon, such as political movement, socio-economic movement, discursive features, ideology and leaders across geographical, historical and ideological context. Here, it is aimed to contribute to the recent efforts to construct a epistemological framework for analyzing populism.

2. Objectives of the Study

- To analyze populist movement as having a broad overall organization, structure and ideology that aim at social change.
- To understand ideologies of different social movements characterized as populist movement.
- To find out difference in empirical and ontological referents of the movements for which the term 'populism' is used.
- To study populism as an ideology and populist movement to provide a general theoretical structure to clarify the concept.
- To understand populism and its function in economic development.
- To analyze charismatic leadership adopting a certain style, rhetoric and personalized link between the leader and the led.
- To understand populism's overtures as anti-institutional, anti-pluralism, simplicity and its directness and particular moralistic imagination of politics.

3. Conceptual Framework

Populism: The word ‘populism’ derived from the Latin word ‘populous’, which means ‘people’ in English. Populism is commonly defined that the political doctrine that supports the right and powers of the common people in their struggle with privileged elite.

Equivalential Chain: unfulfilled demands concerning health, schooling, transport, security, etc, a certain solidarity is established between all of them. This is what we call an *equivalential chain.*

Floating Signifier: Floating signifiers are signifiers without referents, such as a word that doesn’t point to any actual object and has no agreed upon meaning.

People: These words at the outset of a decode in which many movements would arise claiming to speak in the name of ‘the people’ and protesting oppression of the people by various usurpers of power.

Democratic Demand: Demand is an elementary form in the building up of the social link. The word ‘demand’ is ambiguous in English. It can mean a request. But it can mean a claim (as in demanding an explanation). The *requests* are changing into *claims*. Demand is satisfied or not, that is called democratic *demand*.

4. Research Question

- What is populism and its defining elements?
- What are the central elements of populism?
- Is populism a type of movement or a type of ideology?
- What is the relation between the social and political aspects of the populism?
- What are the connections between democracy, populism and representative politics?
- What populism means by the term ‘people’ and how does it claim to speak exclusively for “the silent majority” or “the real people”?
- How does populism affect the culture and thought and how does it impact the approaches to social enquiry?
- How can the concept of discourse help to clarify key theoretical problems of populism and illuminate empirical cases of populist movements?
- What are the epistemological bases of populism and how do such populist epistemological bases emerge out of the social conditions?

5. Review of Literature

On Populist Reason (2005) written by Ernesto Laclau. This book, first part presents a critical reading of the existing literature on populism, demonstrating its dependency on the basic categories elaborated by the theorists of 'mass psychology', from Taine and Le Bon to Tarde, McDougall and Freud. The second part forms the main theoretical core of the work, where the question of the emergence of the 'people' as a political and social force is treated. The concepts – such as, empty and floating signifiers, hegemony and heterogeneity – are developed here in new and innovative directions. In particular, the relation of populism to democracy and to the logic of representation is given special emphasis. The third part is devoted to particular case studies of both the conditions leading to the emergence of the 'people' and the obstacles preventing its formation. Finally, in a concluding chapter, Laclau locates the question of popular identities within the context of a globalized world and differentiates his approach from those of other theoreticians such as Zizek, Hardt and Negri and Ranciere. This book is essential reading for all those interested in the question of political identities in present-day societies.

Laclau's most significant book is *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985), which he co-authored with Chantal Mouffe. The position outlined in this book is usually described as post-Marxist because it rejects (a) Marxist economic determinism and (b) the view that class struggle is the most important antagonism in society. Laclau and Mouffe commented on this label, stating that they were also 'post-Marxist' work. Their work, though a departure from traditional Western Marxism, retained similar concerns and ideas. In the final chapter of the book, the project of "radical and plural democracy" was advocated: a democracy in which subjects accept the importance of the values of liberty and equality, but fight over what the terms mean. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy,* Laclau and Mouffe also offered a unique account of 'discourse'. By drawing on the work of the later Wittgenstein, they argued that social entities only become meaningful through discursive articulation. As such, the meaning of something is never pre-given but is, instead, constructed through social practices. Laclau subsequently used this account of discourse to re-consider the nature of identity, arguing that all political identities are discursive – even if they are experienced by individuals as 'natural' (even to the point where one's identity is not recognized as an identity). For example, though an individual may think that they are just 'born male' this is, for Laclau, not the case: 'maleness' is a socially constructed category that has no innate meaning.

Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism (1977) is the book written by Laclau Ernesto. His book offered a polite but devastating critique of the

conventional discourse on Latin America at the time. Laclau showed them to be part and parcel of Latin American capitalism which fostered enormous wealth and desperate poverty. Inequality in Latin America was greater than in any other region of the globe. This book seeks to furnish a theory of the political and ideological superstructures, as against an underlying economic base or foundation, by tackling the problems of economic determinism and class reductionism in Marxist theory. Laclau played a key role in reformulating Marxist theory in the light of the collapse of communism and failure of social democracy. This book attempts to build a new general theory of populism, about populist movements in third world countries and its components such as a claim for equality of political rights and universal participation of for the common people.

6. Scope and Coverage

The study will help to understand what kinds of social, political and cultural circumstances influence the modernity and its offshoot, populism, in the making of the present world. This may further help us to understand and analyze the problems from myriad theoretical perspectives – including structuralism, post structuralism, modernization theory, social movement theory, party politics, political economy and democratic theory.

7. Approach and Methodology

The study uses both descriptive and analytical methods. At the same time, study aims at an exploratory, qualitative and critical approach. Populism is a variety of protest movement in Indian context that have followed diverse conceptual frameworks. Research would also highlight its empirical and ontic issues. Basically, it will be theoretical in its approach.

8. Sources

The primary sources are the authentic writings of various scholars on various aspects of populism available in English. The researcher will also use the relevant secondary sources available in the form of publications.

9. Tentative Chapterisation

The introductory chapter discusses the objectives of the study, the context, the research issues, and the scope of the study, methodology and sources of the study.

The second chapter is titled "**Populism as Movement**". In general, movement is a group of people working together to advance their shared political, social or artistic idea. Populist movement was the coalition of agrarian reformers in the Middle West and the South of South America that advocated a wide range of economic and political legislation in the late 19th century.

Throughout the 1880s, local political action groups known as farmers' alliances sprang up among Middle Westerners and Southerners of South America, who were discontent with crop failures, falling prices, poor marketing and credit facilities. Although it won some significant regional victories, the alliances generally became politically ineffective on a national scale. Thus in 1892 their leaders organized the populist or people's movements as the farmers' alliances melted away. While trying to broaden their base to include labour, and other groups, the populists remained almost entirely agrarian oriented.

We may legitimately rationalize the growing tendency to use the term 'populism' to cover many and various movements as recognition of this particular character of political ideas in the modern world. Populism is a type of movement found among those aware of belonging to the poor periphery of an industrial system; it may be taken as a reaction to industrialism.

Populist movements mobilized masses of ordinary people, arising at least initially from the grass roots and invoking the name of 'the people' against the established or corrupt elites. This can be distinguished from many political leaders and officials who have used populist rhetoric or adopted a populist style as a political strategy. And some of that populist movement should be regarded as predominantly progressive in nature.

Populism as constituting a common feature, shared by quite distinct political movements which then determine a priori that this feature must find its explanation in the social bases of those movements. Populism ceases to be considered a common feature of various movements and is transformed into a synthetic concept which defines or symbolizes the complex of features characteristic of concrete movement under investigation.

The third chapter is titled "**Populism as Ideology**". Ideology is an important aspect of social and political movements. The most basic and commonly held view of ideology is that it is a system of multiple beliefs, ideas, values, principles, ethics, morals, goals and so on, that overlap, shape, and reinforce one another. Ideology is often an implicit and assumed feature of movements. Without an ideology that articulates and identifies a mobilization's beliefs and

goals, it would be difficult to speak of this as a movement at all. One of the most prominent approaches to ideology has been to stress its cognitive or social psychological process. Since ideology is held to provide a systematization and articulation of underlying beliefs, it can be said that ideology is one method that the actors use to make sense of social world.

Populism will be presented essentially as a peasant ideology, or an ideology elaborated by intellectuals that exalts peasant values. It will be considered an ideology and mobilization typical of a society of small farmers opposed to urban life and big business. Where the mobilization of urban masses has often acquired populist connotations, it will be seen as the political and ideological expression either of a petty-bourgeoisie, of marginal sectors, or of a national bourgeoisie seeking of mobilize the masses for a partial confrontation with the local oligarchies and imperialism.

The roots of populism are to be sought in the asynchronism between the processes of transition from one to the other. Populism thus constitutes the form of political expression of popular sectors when they are unable to establish an autonomous organization and class ideology. The higher degree of development would correspond more of a 'class' and less of a 'populist' organization. In that, society develops a growing urban opposition of middle and working-classes who challenge the hegemonic landowning fraction's monopoly of power. In these circumstances, the organic intellectuals of these new groups, trying to make their political opposition consistent and systematic, increasingly appeal to the symbols and values of peasant groups, because they constitute the only ideological raw material which, in this social formation, expresses a radical confrontation with the power bloc. But in the urban reformulation of those symbols and values, they become transformed and lose their reference to a concrete social base and are transformed into the ideological expression of the people or the power bloc confrontation.

'Populism' arises in a specific ideological domain, constituted by the double articulation of political discourse. The dialectical tension between 'the people' and classes determines the form of ideology, both among dominant and dominated sectors.

Gramsci established a dialectic between base and superstructure, the conditions of base influence superstructure, but political processes in the superstructure can also act back on the base. Laclau seeks to furnish a theory of political and ideological superstructures, as against an underlying economic base of foundation, by tackling the problem of economic determinism and class reductionism in Marxist theory. He argues that in orthodox Marxist

theory contradictions are seen in hierarchical system that can be directly reduced to a class contradiction. Lacalu dismiss the Marxist concept of society that society can be described, as a totality constituted by certain classes. According Laclau, society is never as unambiguous historical materialism suggested. The meaning of Society is not an objective existing phenomena. For Marxism, people have objective (class) identity even if they do not realize it. For Laclau, it cannot be determined beforehand what group will become politically relevant. People's identities (both collective and individual) are the result of contingent, discursive process and as such are part of the discursive struggle.

The fourth chapter is titled "**Popular Knowledge Production and Populism as a Discursive Practice**". Populism – made up mostly of farmers but also of wage workers and middle class activists – provided one of the most intense challenges to corporate power in the globe. The men and women of the populist movement perceived and acted on the fast-moving changes of their modern world. The populists challenged the corporate frameworks. They protested the inequitable distribution of wealth. They demanded the Enlightenment notions of progress as firmly as their opponents did, and this allowed them to shape the weapons of protest out of the modern materials of technological, organizational and ideological innovation. It gave the populist necessary confidence to act.

In the twenty-first century, new structures of corporate prerogatives and control are being presented as the inevitable outcomes of new technologies and the new realities of a global economy. The populist experience puts into question such claims of inevitability. The populist revolt reflected a conflict over divergent paths of modern capitalist development. Modern society is not a given but is shaped by men and women who pursue alternative visions of what the modern world should be.

The populists believe that the challenges facing their farms and homesteads require national solution. In that populist, as a national movement, focuses on farmers and also include wage earners and bohemian urbanities. It examines topics from education, technology, women's right, and business, to government, race, religion and science. Looking at the populists with a wide lens points to the need for many-sided revaluation of what populism is.

Populism as a discursive practice is used to conceptualize an aspect of the context in which discourse and meaning-making processes, such as framing and narration, are generally embedded. It has been formulated and used in overlapping ways to advance understanding of various phenomena relevant to the study of culture and social movement. Here, it becomes

clear that a discursive analysis of populism moves beyond the assessment of empirical contents, ideology, organization, etc. and focuses on form. This entails a move of the whole scope of analysis from ideologies and movements not only to discourse but to discursive practices constructing 'the people' by employing equivalential articulator logic.

Laclau and Mouffe have created their theory by combining and modifying two major theoretical traditions from Marxism and Structuralism. Marxism provides an initial point for thinking about social change and structuralism provides a theoretical meaning. They constructed these traditions into a single poststructuralist theory; that is, the whole social field is understood as a web of processes in which meaning is created. Saussure's structural linguistics analysed the fixation of meaning of signs. Laclau and Mouffe never be agreed with the Saussurian sense. They say that fixation of meaning is impossible. Every concrete meaning is contingent. But the meaning of each sign is locked into a specific relationship to the others. The meaning of sign is to be partially fixed. Every expression is an active reduction of the possibility of meaning because it positions the signs in relation to one another in only one way. For instance, floating signifiers are the signs that different discourse struggle to invest with meaning in their own particular way. The term 'floating signifier' belongs to the ongoing struggle between different discourse to fix the meaning of important signs. Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse and articulation and its concepts of floating signifiers is to be seen as a form of language which can describe the empirical material in a different way in which it describes itself. It is a linguistic tools of discourse analysis and the rhetorical tools discursive practices.

The fifth chapter is titled "**Populist Epistemology**". In populist epistemology, truth is determined by what people think, on opinion polls and public opinion that do not reflect objective reality in its deeper workings and dynamics and pathways of change. It reflects people's false ideas and ways of thinking out of sync with objective reality, figuring out what's correct and incorrect, in other words what accurately reflects reality.

What's needed is going out and struggling to transform people's thinking and modes of thinking on all this, increasingly involving them in this movement for revolution even as they are sorting out their thinking on all this. What largely dominates as modes of thinking in society is non-evidence based thinking and religiosity, not thinking critically of what is constantly trumpeted through media, culture, education proceeding from narrative instead of identifying the larger and underlying patterns and dynamics in society. Ultimately not

looking beyond surface level phenomena to determine objective reality and other modes of thought that are none and antiscientific.

Knowledge of the world should not be treated as neutral or objective. Knowledge is a force of production. It is similar to Foucault's concept of power. The word 'power' denote to the force and the processes which create our social world and make it meaningful for us. The point is that this understanding of power emphasizes the contingency of our social world. It is power that creates our knowledge, our identities and how we relate to one another as group or individuals. Knowledge, identities and social antagonism are all contingent. Laclau focuses on a radical thinking of populist politics and it is implication for the extension and depending of democratic forms and practices.

Laclau developed his theory through a critical reading of Marxist theory of ideology and politics and elaborating this approach the work of Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althuseer. Laclau used to develop post-Marxist theory of hegemony, articulation, the basic concept of difference and equivalence, and the basic distinction between signifier and signified, and the distinction between social antagonism and dislocation. Laclau introduces poststructuralist thought of Jacques Derrida and Foucault and post-analytical philosophy of Wittgenstein and Rorty and also psycho-analytic philosophy of Jacques Lacan and Freud.

Finally, the sixth chapter is "**Conclusion**". Conclusions are drawn from the analysis of the contents of previous chapters.

10. Limitation

Theoretical perspectives in the problems have to be identified and corrected in the future course of researches. With the kind of various faces of populism, how to identify theoretically all these diverse levels of populism itself is a big problem.

11. Bibliography

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